

# **Education Advocacy Guide for Caregivers**

**Supporting School Success for  
Children and Youth in Care**



Children's Administration  
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

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# introduction to

# education advocacy



## Introduction to the Education Advocacy Guide

There are times in all of our lives when we need an advocate, someone who supports us and encourages us and speaks up for us when necessary. All children – no matter who they are – need an advocate at some point to help with their education.

Nationally, as well as in Washington State, children and youth in out-of-home care are not succeeding in school. Compared with other students, they:

- Score 15 to 20% lower on achievement tests
- Repeat a grade, change schools, or enroll in special education twice as many times as their peers
- Are 57% less likely to complete high school

The “Education Advocacy Guide for Caregivers: Supporting School Success for Children and Youth in Care” is specifically written for you – a caregiver for a child or youth in out-of-home care.

This guide is a road map that can help you better understand what education advocacy is and what is expected of students from preschool to high school who are in the public education system. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities of caregivers and social workers, offering ideas for developing good learning habits at any age with tips about how to encourage, troubleshoot, and advocate for your child or youth whether they are just beginning school or in their final year.

Keep in mind while reading this guide that learning how and why to advocate is a way to be prepared – and stay prepared. Advocate, advocate, and advocate. **You can never be too involved in supporting a child’s education.**



decision

## Information Sharing and Decision Making

### What information can I share with the school?

### What information can the social worker share?

#### CAREGIVERS can share the following information:

- Attendance/truancy
- Credits earned/needed
- Discipline/behavioral issues (as they pertain to education)
- Enrollment
- Extracurricular activities
- Grades/academic performance
- Individual Education Program (IEP)/504 Plan
- Meals received at school
- Post-secondary planning
- School history
- Transitions between schools
- Transportation needs

#### What can SOCIAL WORKERS share with schools that I can't share?

- Birth family history
- Abuse/neglect history
- Health issues (as they relate to school)
- Mental health history
- Any other information pertaining to education that the school should know

#### Tip

Just because you CAN share the information, doesn't mean you HAVE to. If you think you want to share something, take a minute to make sure that the information is relevant to the issue. Where and how will the information be exchanged? What is the purpose of disclosing the information? Once something is in a child's education record, it is hard to delete.

#### Tip

If you are ever uncertain about what paperwork you can sign, always ask your social worker for clarification.

For more detailed information on information sharing please refer to "Field Guide for Information Sharing" at [www.k12.wa.us/ReadinessToLearn/resources.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/ReadinessToLearn/resources.aspx).



roles and responsibilities



## Roles and Responsibilities

### The Role of the Child/Youth:

All children need to feel in charge of their education. They need to be asked questions; they need to be listened to. They should feel responsible for their education, too. By middle school, youth should be helping to plan their education.

#### Some ways youth can become responsible for their education:

- Monitor the progress of their education (talk to their teachers, check their grades online)
- Attend school regularly
- Enroll in classes that are required to graduate
- Complete all homework
- Prepare for all tests
- Use tutoring and other services to help them make up missing credits

### The Role of the Caregivers:

Caregivers play an important role in a child's education. They are vital in re-enforcing the importance of education. Caregivers are also uniquely positioned to help the children in their care be successful in school. They can advocate for education in many ways.

#### Some easy ways to advocate:

- Make sure the child attends school regularly
- Check in often with the school and the social worker
- Know and follow the child's education plan as developed in their ISSP or IEP
- Be involved in homework, parent/teacher meetings, extracurricular activities, and other activities

### Tip

Children need to feel that their education belongs to them and is their responsibility also.

Help them feel in charge of their education plans.



- Communicate to the child's social worker the child's educational progress and needs
- Make sure the child has school supplies, clothing and equipment
- Make sure the child is getting enough sleep and starts the school day with a nutritious breakfast
- Attend school planning meetings
- Assume the responsibilities as agreed upon in the Individual Safety and Service Plan (ISSP)
- Speak up about educational needs or concerns that come up in homework or parent-teacher conferences
- Make sure that the social worker has copies of all school documents, such as grades, transcripts, and IEPs

### **The Role of Parents:**

There are great advantages to having a parent participate in education planning when it is possible. It allows parents to be involved in their child's life in a safe and supported way.

When a child is in out of home care, parents can still attend school meetings, IEP meetings and parent/teacher conferences. Parents can also keep up with what their children learn by asking them about their school day, what they study in class and helping them with their homework during visits.

### **The Role of the Social Worker:**

Social workers have the responsibility to make sure that the child's/youth's needs are met, including educational needs. They can, however, delegate responsibility for the child's education to another adult. The social worker decides who will be the primary person responsible for the child's educational progress. If the caregiver is willing, it is the social worker's responsibility to prepare the caregiver for this role.

### **Ways social workers can prepare caregivers:**

- Familiarize them with the education rights of children/youth in foster care
- Develop a communication plan for sharing information on the child's/youth's educational status
- Develop a process with the caregiver to monitor the child's/youth's progress
- Help them to understand report cards and attendance records
- Provide caregivers and youth with information about educational resources available

### **Tip**

Before a child is placed in a school, or at the earliest planning meeting, have a conversation with the social worker to clarify your role and the social worker's role.

Ask what the social worker is going to do.

Ask what I, as the caregiver, will do?

### **Tip**

The social worker and the caregiver should discuss the child's/youth's education at regular, frequent meetings.

**Ways social workers can help with educational advocacy:**

- Place children in the same school district when possible or when a school change is inevitable, ensure that they are enrolled in a new school within 3 school days
- Involve the child in education planning and decisions and enter education information in the FamLink Education Pages
- Social Workers submit the Education Plan to the court every six months
- Go to Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings and other school meetings
- Help identify any issues relating to a child's development or any disabilities they may have
- Refer to education resources (e.g. Education Advocacy Program, tutoring, mentoring)
- Help children and youth get referred to appropriate programs as soon as possible
- Plan for education and training after high-school, and make sure that Independent Living services are provided to older youth
- Help kids with various issues such as fees, fines, lost books, eyeglasses, hearing aids, transportation, interpreters, etc.



# What Carriers



## **What Caregivers Should Know**

### ***Doing Your Homework First***

If it was an ideal world, schools, families and communities work together to provide the best for each student. Due to life's everyday up's and down's, this doesn't always happen. Sometimes relationships can go sour when difficult issues arise.

As a caregiver, it is important to build good relationships at the same time that you are standing up for what a student needs to succeed in school.

#### **10 tips to create good working relationships with the schools**

1. Let school officials know you respect them and will work with them
2. Attend meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and school events
3. Check in with teachers regularly, not just when there's a problem (Email is a great way to do this!)
4. Follow up on reported problems
5. Respond to all school communications promptly
6. Ask the child regularly how he or she thinks things are going
7. Look for chances to help the young person communicate his or her thoughts and feelings to teachers and others
8. Let the school know you are interested in this student and will follow up on important issues
9. If a problem arises, always ask for and listen to the school's side of the issue
10. Make sure the school has information needed to provide the right kind of education for this particular student

## **Getting Organized**

It can be difficult to take the time to keep all the paperwork organized for the children coming into your home. But, if you can make the time it will help ensure the success of the child in school. Here are some tips other caregivers have found useful in organizing school paperwork:

### **Three areas where being prepared pays off:**

- Student Meetings
- Records
- Hearings

### **Tips for organizing student records and notes**

1. Keep everything you receive. Use a big envelope or box labeled “School Papers” to help you stay organized
2. Keep a separate education file for each child in your home. If you have a lot of papers, organize them in different categories: letters and correspondence, special education, grades and attendance, discipline notices, etc.
3. Keep copies of all letters, notes or other written communication with the school. Be sure to store them in a safe place to ensure the child’s confidentiality
4. Put everything in writing. Even if you’ve asked for something in person or in a telephone conversation, follow up with a note. Handwriting is fine. Some things require that a request be made in writing in order for special legal protections to fall into place, such as the appeal of an expulsion
5. Keep a log on a special pad of paper in the student’s file when you are working on a particular issue with a school district







## School Stability and Enrollment

# enrollment

One of the hardest situations children in care face is changing schools frequently. There are many benefits to keeping a child in the same school even if his or her residence changes.

The child or youth does not need to automatically transfer to a new school just because of a move to a new neighborhood. Each school and district has a staff member known as a Homeless Liaison, who may be able to help in these situations.

If a child has to move to a new school, the caregiver and the social worker need to work together to make the change as easy as possible on the child or youth. Be sure they have an opportunity to say goodbye to their friends and teachers. If possible, move during the school break or at times when the transition will be easiest.

### How do I enroll a student in school?

Enrolling a child or youth in a new school might seem overly complicated but if you keep the most important things in mind the process will be easier than you think.

Remember that a student should be enrolled as soon as possible. **This CAN happen even if information is missing. A student should not be out of school for more than three days.**

- Contact the school district or local school to pick up an “enrollment packet.” If you expect problems, also request a copy of the district’s written enrollment or admission policies
- For a first-time enrollment in Washington public schools, the school district may request a copy of the student’s birth certificate. If the student has been in another school in the state, the district will ask for the names of previous school districts, information about the student’s disciplinary history, special educational needs and any health conditions

### Tip

When you enroll the youth in school, add the social worker’s name and phone number as the second contact after you.

Then the social worker will receive information from the school, saving time.

- Proof of immunization is usually required before beginning school. Records which show that a student has completed all required vaccinations will satisfy the requirement of proof of immunization. If you do not have proof of immunization, contact the child's social worker

### **Troubleshooting: What if I don't have all of the paperwork?**

- Enroll the student right away even if you don't have everything you think you need

**Schools are required by state and federal laws to take steps to help enroll "out-of-home" students, including students in foster care. These steps may include:**

- Waiving the requirement for parental signatures
- Arranging for vaccinations at community clinics instead of requiring a written record of immunization

### **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act: What is it? Why is it so important?**

#### **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**

This is a federal law which allows homeless youth to stay in their original school when they have to move and provides the transportation to make

**The school stability and enrollment information contained in this guide is adapted from TeamChild's education advocacy manual, *Make a Difference in a Child's Life: A Manual for Helping Children and Youth Get What They Need in School* (Revised August 2006)© TeamChild and Casey Family Programs.**

it happen. It also allows homeless youth to enroll in new schools quickly without having all their required paperwork, such as school records or immunizations.

**Children and youth in foster care are considered homeless under this law when they are living in certain temporary placements such as:**

- Short-term foster/relative or group homes
- Receiving homes
- Assessment Centers
- Respite care (in some situations)
- Crisis Residential Centers and Shelters

### **Tip**

No proof of residency is required for enrollment, but if you anticipate any problems, consider providing copies of any documents (DSHS letters, court orders, etc.) that support your claim of residency.

If you have a youth that you think may qualify under this law, contact the Homeless Liaison at the school or district. The name and contact information for local Homeless Liaisons are available at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/pubdocs/HomelessLiaisonContactList.doc>

For more information on McKinney-Vento refer to Child Welfare League of America at <http://www.cwla.org/programs/housing/mckinneyvento.htm> and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty at <http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/pubdocs/PolicyBrief.doc>.







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## School Discipline

School discipline is defined broadly. It's critical that caregivers understand the differences between certain terms of discipline. For example, suspension and expulsion mean two different things. Short-term and long-term suspensions have different consequences.

Discipline also involves different laws when pertaining to children receiving Special Education services. (See the section on Special Education Discipline)

### **Three important pieces of information to know about discipline:**

- Students have a right to an education, even if they misbehave at school
- Students have a right to challenge school decisions if they believe the punishment for misbehavior is not fair or if there is a disagreement about what happened
- Students have a right to due process. Due process is a legal concept that ensures that a person will be notified and have an opportunity to be heard before a public entity, such as a school, denies, reduces, or terminates a person's rights

### **What are a student's responsibilities at school?**

- Attend school and be on time to classes
- Follow school rules
- Behave appropriately on the bus, including following bus driver's directions
- Show respect to other students and school staff
- Do not bring drugs, alcoholic beverages or tobacco to school
- Do not have weapons on school property or carry weapons on the way to and from school. Weapons are defined differently in different school settings. It's important for the student and caregiver to review school district policies in order to learn what is considered a weapon in the school setting
- Do not participate in any gangs or gang-related activity at school

### **What are a student's rights if he or she is kicked out of school?**

The school administrator (usually a Principal or Vice Principal) must:

- Give the student a chance to tell his or her side of the story
- Give reasons for kicking a student out, explaining which rule was broken
- Tell the student that he or she will be suspended or expelled

### **What is a short-term suspension?**

A suspension for ten school days or less is called a short-term suspension.

### **What are a student's basic rights with a short-term suspension?**

Schools must try other ways to correct problem behavior before using a short-term suspension. A student serving a short-term suspension must be allowed to make up missed schoolwork if the suspension will have a substantial effect on grades or prevent the student from getting credit for the course.

A kindergarten to 4th-grader cannot be short-term suspended for a total of more than 10 days in a term. A student in grades five and above cannot be short-term suspended for a total of more than 15 days in a semester or 10 days in a trimester.

### **What is the process for short-term suspension?**

A student has the right to an informal conference with school district administration before serving the suspension. The student has a right to give his or her side of the story at the informal conference. Before the informal conference, the school must give the student oral or written notice describing:

- The alleged bad behavior
- The school district rule that was broken
- An explanation of the facts showing that the bad behavior really happened
- An explanation of the corrective action or punishment that the school district wants to impose

If the suspension is going to last more than one day, the district must provide written and/or oral notice to the student's family.

### **What if the caregiver and the student are still unhappy with the short-term suspension after an informal conference?**

A student or his or her family can file a grievance with the school Principal. A grievance is a written statement explaining why the student is unhappy with the short-term suspension. A child's social worker should be involved in this process. The Principal must hold an informal conference to try to resolve the grievance. During the conference, the Principal can ask questions of the student, the student's parent or guardian, and the school staff involved in the matter.

### **Tip**

It is important that the student be sent home with documentation for the suspension, even if the suspension is for just a half-day. Documentation provides a picture of what happened, and this is important for both the caregiver and the social worker.

If the student or his or her family is still unhappy after the grievance conference, another grievance can be filed with the Superintendent and then a third with the school board. Further challenge of the short-term suspension would most likely need to occur in court.

### **What is a long-term suspension?**

A long-term suspension is an exclusion from school for a defined period of time that lasts more than 10 school days in a row.

### **What are a student's basic rights with a long-term suspension?**

The reasons for the violation must warrant a long-term suspension. This means that the punishment must be appropriate for the bad behavior.

The school must first try other ways to address the behavior, unless the rule violation is "exceptional misconduct." Exceptional misconduct is a category of bad behavior that can be punished more harshly. Your school district should have a list of actions which are considered exceptional misconduct.

### **What steps can a caregiver take to challenge a long-term suspension?**

1. In writing, request a hearing as soon as you receive notice. You only have three school business days. If you miss the timeline, you may lose your chance to challenge the suspension.
2. Deliver the hearing request to the school or board office, whichever is specified in the notice.
3. Keep a copy of your request. Ask the person receiving it to stamp or write the date and his or her initials on your copy.
4. Once a hearing is requested, the school district must schedule the hearing within three school business days. If necessary, the student or caregiver can ask the school district for more time to prepare or find an attorney.

Students in Kindergarten through fourth grade cannot be given long-term suspensions. Students in fifth grade or above cannot be given a long-term suspension if it will cause a loss of academic grades or credit for more than one semester or trimester during the same school year.

### **What is an expulsion?**

An expulsion is an exclusion from school for an undefined period of time. An expulsion can also include a denial of admission to or entry onto property owned, leased, rented, or controlled by a school district.

### **What are a student's basic rights with an expulsion?**

Expulsions are usually used for very serious violations of school rules. The school must try other ways to address the behavior first, unless other ways have been tried and failed or there is good reason to believe that other forms of corrective action or punishment wouldn't change the student's behavior.

- Expelled students can ask to be readmitted at any time
- Students have three school business days to request a hearing to challenge the expulsion
- Once a hearing is requested, the school district must schedule the hearing within three school business days. If necessary, the student or caregiver can ask the school district for more time to prepare or find an attorney

### **What is the process of expulsion?**

- Schools must give written notice to the student and his or her parent or guardian before imposing the expulsion
- The notice must be delivered in person or by certified mail
- The notice must:
  - Be written in the predominant language of the family
  - Describe the events that led to the expulsion
  - Identify the rule that was broken
  - Describe the punishment
  - Explain the right to a hearing, how to request a hearing, and the timelines for making a request

### **What is an emergency expulsion?**

An immediate removal from school for an indefinite period of time is an emergency expulsion.



### **What are a student's basic rights with an emergency expulsion?**

Districts can expel a student on an emergency basis when there is good and sufficient reason to believe that the student's presence would be unsafe to him/herself or to others. Districts can also order an emergency expulsion if the student's presence presents an immediate and continuing threat of substantial disruption to the education process.

Emergency expulsions have no definite ending time. They continue until the school district says that the "emergency" is over or until a hearing officer changes it as a result of a hearing. Students who have been emergency expelled have 10 school business days to request a hearing to challenge the emergency expulsion. Once a hearing is requested, the school district must schedule the hearing within three school business days. If necessary, the student or caregiver can ask the school district for more time to prepare or find an attorney.

### **What is the process for emergency expulsion?**

Schools must give written notice to the student and his or her parent or guardian. The notice must be hand delivered or sent by certified mail within 24 hours of the expulsion. In addition to the written notice, the school must try to notify the student and family by telephone or in person as soon as reasonably possible.

#### **The written and oral notice must:**

- Be in the predominant language of the family
- Describe the events that led to the expulsion
- Identify the rule that was broken
- Describe the punishment
- Explain the right to a hearing, how to request a hearing, and the timelines for making a request

### **What should I know about discipline hearings?**

A discipline hearing allows students to challenge the claims that they did something wrong. Even if they admit to the wrongdoing, the hearing can be used to make sure that the punishment is fair. Hearings should be overseen by a third party hearing officer, who will make the final decision. Students should be prepared to present their side of the incident at these hearings.

### **Tip**

At any time, no matter how old your child or youth is, if you have concerns about a child's developmental progress, do not hesitate to contact the social worker working with your family.

**The school discipline information contained in this guide is adapted from TeamChild's education advocacy manual, *Make a Difference in a Child's Life: A Manual for Helping Children and Youth Get What They Need in School* (Revised August 2006)© TeamChild and Casey Family Programs.  
[www.TeamChild.org](http://www.TeamChild.org) and [www.Casey.org](http://www.Casey.org)**







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## Early Intervention and Special Education

### **What to do if you think your child needs additional educational help:**

The two most frequently asked questions about special education are:

- What do I do if I suspect a child or youth needs additional help?
- How do I access help?

The answers to these two questions depend upon the age of your child or youth.

### **Early Intervention: Birth to Three**

For children birth to three years old, a referral can be made by the social worker to the Family Resources Coordinator (FRC) with the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Program (ESITP). Caregivers are also encouraged to self refer if they have a concern about a child's development. You do not need a doctor's referral to get into early intervention. Early intervention services are provided to eligible children and families through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

If the child qualifies for services, a team will meet to develop a plan within 45 days after a referral has been made. The IFSP is ongoing. The plan changes as the needs of the child change, and it is reviewed at least every six months and rewritten yearly.

### **What is included in an Individualized Family Services Plan?**

- Description of what the child is doing now
- A detailed description of what services are needed (i.e., how often, how long, where they will happen and who will pay for them)
- A written statement if services are not provided in a natural environment (i.e., settings where children without disabilities are found)
- Timelines of when services will begin and end, and when the plan is reviewed
- Listing of other services needed that are not funded by ESITP, and who can help find these services

- Develop transition plan for child prior to age three
  - to plan for services once the child reaches age three
  - to preschool special education services if eligible
  - and/or other community services if not eligible for preschool special education.

### **What happens at an Individualized Family Services Plan Meeting?**

A team will discuss needed services in health, education and social services. The Family Resources Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the meeting and for developing and implementing the IFSP. Participants at the IFSP meeting(s) should include:

- Parent(s) of the child, if appropriate
- Caregiver(s) of the child
- Family Resources Coordinator responsible for implementing the IFSP
- Other family members, an advocate, or person outside the family as requested by the family
- Persons directly involved in conducting the evaluation and assessments or, if unable to attend, arrangements should be made for sharing the information through other means
- Other service provider(s), as appropriate, to the child and family

Together the IFSP team will develop the plan and identify services needed to enhance the child's development. The plan is reviewed every six months and rewritten annually or more often if conditions warrant.

(For more information on ESITP refer to <http://www.del.wa.gov/ESITP> or call Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.)

### **Transition to Preschool Special Education Services (Ages three to five)**

When the child is transitioning from the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Program, your social worker should:

- Participate, as appropriate, in the development and implementation of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) throughout the child's placement in preschool special education services
- As appropriate, share resources and/or make a referral for the child and family to community-based early learning and care programs such as Head Start and Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP)

- Assist with transition planning for children entering into kindergarten

### **How to request an Education Assessment for children ages 3 to 18**

If you have developmental concerns about your child (ages three to five), the child can be referred for further evaluation and assessment to the school or district where the child is enrolled. You can also call the WithinReach/ Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

When educational concerns are noted for school-aged children, a written request must be made to child's/youth's school, documenting the concerns and requesting the school district evaluate the student for services under both IDEA and Section 504. The child's parent, social worker, foster parent, or anyone else knowledgeable about the student can make this referral. After the school has received the request, they have 25 school days to decide whether or not to evaluate. The school must then send written notice of their decision to the parent. Most often, a school meeting is called.

When the school decides to evaluate, they must first get written permission from whomever is acting as the parent. The special education laws have a specific definition of parent and there may be more than one person who meets this definition. More information is available about this topic in Chapter three of TeamChild's Education Advocacy Manual, available at [www.teamchild.org](http://www.teamchild.org). They then have 35 school days to complete the evaluation and bring the team back together to discuss the results and determine if the student is eligible. School districts must evaluate a student in all areas related to his or her suspected disability. The evaluation must be done at no cost to the student or family. If there is disagreement with the results of an evaluation, an independent educational evaluation (IEE) may be requested at district expense.

### **Special Education Laws**

The two primary laws that protect students with disabilities are Section 504 and IDEA. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was passed by the US Congress in 1973 and makes it illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities in programs receiving federal funds, such as public schools. Two years later, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. This



federal law is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA. It was most recently revised in 2004. The IDEA provides protections to children who fall within certain categories of disability specifically outlined in the law. See <http://idea.ed.gov>.

### **What is an Individual Education Program (IEP)?**

An IEP is a detailed description of the instruction and services needed by a student eligible for special education in order to receive a meaningful education. The IEP is a document that describes the specific special education, related services and accommodations that a child will receive. An IEP should be tailored to a child and his or her educational needs, and it can include creative strategies for delivering services.

### **Who is on the Individual Education Program Team?**

The team is made up of people who will help design the student's education program. The following people must be part of the IEP Team and should be present at all IEP meetings:

- Parent, guardian or surrogate parent and the student, if appropriate (foster parent can be considered parent if birth parent is not available). Children's Administration social worker cannot be considered parent under Special Education law. Caregiver should invite social worker to all IEP and special education–related meetings
- At least one of the student's regular education teachers (if the child is or may be participating in the general education environment) and one of the student's special education teachers or providers
- A district representative who is qualified in the education of children with disabilities and is knowledgeable about the general curriculum and available resources, such as a director of special education
- An individual who can interpret evaluation data (can be one of the above people or the school psychologist)
- At the discretion of the parent or district, others who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child
- Transition service providers, such as vocational specialists or someone from an outside agency such as the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) should be present for a child aged 16 or older
- Under certain circumstances, IEP team members may be excused from attending the IEP meeting. However,

there are very specific rules about when a team member does not need to be in attendance. Ask for a copy of the procedural safeguards notice or see TeamChild's Education Advocacy Manual, available at [www.teamchild.org](http://www.teamchild.org), for more information about IEP teams

### **What can I expect from an Individual Education Program meeting?**

- The first IEP meeting must occur within 30 calendar days of the completion of the evaluation
- The meeting must be held at a mutually agreed upon time and place. This is usually the school, but it could be a telephone conference call or home visit
- During the meeting, results of evaluations and testing will be shared. Results may be from any or all of the disciplines represented
- If the child transfers to a new school district, the new school must finish the evaluation from the previous school if it is incomplete. With a youth who has already qualified, the new school can either adopt the existing IEP or create its own, but it cannot interrupt the delivery of services to the student
- The meeting will focus on the student's strengths, performance levels, goals and timelines, services needed, how services will be delivered, and how much time will be spent receiving services
- Sharing the student's strengths is important, and it is appropriate to share knowledge of what the child is like and what works with him or her
- Decisions will be made about the student's placement and how services will be delivered: in a full-time (self-contained) program, in a resource room for a specified period of time, or in an in-class model. Children with disabilities have the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment. This means that an IEP Team must consider educating and providing services to a student in the same setting as students without disabilities for academic, non-academic, and extracurricular activities. Take a copy of the IEP to review. The IEP can be signed and returned after review. If this is an initial IEP, services will not begin until there is consent for receipt of services
- The finished IEP should describe what the student needs, what the school will provide and the anticipated outcomes

- An IEP can be reviewed at any time if revisions are needed. It is always reviewed once a year, and a re-evaluation occurs every three years

### **What is included in an Individual Education Program?**

- A statement of the student's current levels of educational performance (e.g., academic skill level in math, reading, or other areas of concern)
- Specific education goals for both general and special education classes
- Documentation of how progress will be measured and reported
- Descriptions of all the services, assistive technology, accommodations and modifications to be provided and dates when services will begin
- Any modifications the student will have for taking state or district achievement tests
- For students 16 and older, the IEP should include transition plans

### **Individual Education Program and Behavioral Issues**

The IEP should include a Behavior Intervention Plan if behavior problems exist. For a student whose behavior gets in the way of his/her learning or that of other students, the IEP should provide goals for improving behavior and strategies for addressing the problem. It is important to remember that a student's behavior may be related to

his or her disability. The IEP should anticipate behavior problems and create effective ways to respond to those problems before they occur.

### **504 Accommodation Plan**

#### ***What is the main difference between a 504 Plan and an Individual Education Program?***

Children who have disabilities that do not meet one of the specific definitions under the Individual with Disability Education Act (IDEA) may still be entitled to a 504 Accommodation Plan if they have a disability that substantially limits a major life activity. Some examples of a major life activity are learning, walking, seeing and hearing. School districts must ensure that students with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate in all aspects of school on an equal basis with students without disabilities.

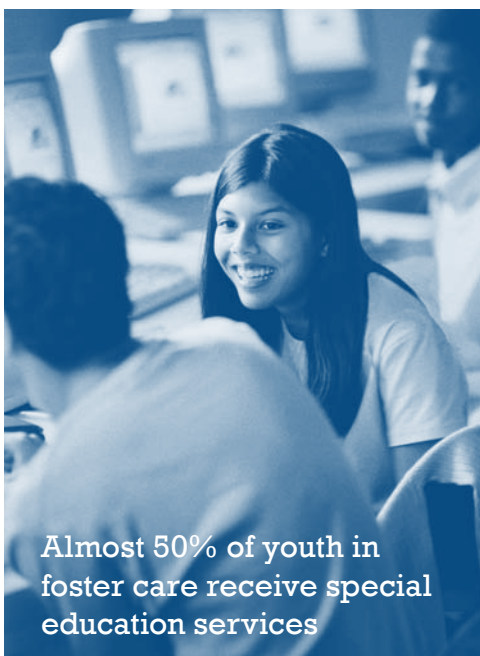
Depending upon the student's individual needs, a school district may be required to provide the following: accommodations in academic, non-academic and extracurricular activities, adaptive equipment or assistive technology devices, an aide, assistance with health related needs, school transportation, or other related services and accommodations. The 504 Plan includes a summary of evaluation data, documentation of eligibility determination, and description of accommodations and placements.

### **Decision Making: Youth in Special Education**

The ability to make effective choices and decisions is one of the most important competencies for all students, especially those with learning disabilities.

Many persons with learning disabilities face difficulties with organizational and planning abilities, decision making, and motivation. These skills are fundamental to making effective decisions and choices. For example, being able to examine an array of options before choosing one is critical to decision making. Planning and motivation are critical to acting on a decision once it has been made.

Learning disabilities are generally hidden disabilities. In our culture, having a disability is often viewed as stigmatizing, so many students with learning disabilities do not acknowledge their disabilities. To get help and resources, youth must disclose their needs related to their disabilities.



**Almost 50% of youth in foster care receive special education services**

This concept is important for school and becomes more important in the workplace. If students choose to disclose their hidden learning disabilities, they must then deal with the perceptions and misperceptions that others may have about them. Educational advocates and others can support students through this process.

Information on decision making with youth in special education contained in this guide is adapted from ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Alan Hoffman, ERIC Identifier: ED481859. For more information on special education students, visit <http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-2/self.html>.

- For general special education information, refer to OPSI Special Education Publications at <http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/publications.aspx>.
- For more detailed information about Special Education, refer to: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, [www.k12.wa.us](http://www.k12.wa.us), or the TeamChild Educational Advocacy Manual at [www.teamchild.org](http://www.teamchild.org) or the Washington State Pave at [www.washingtonpave.org](http://www.washingtonpave.org).

### **For a student in special education, what are his or her basic rights with a long-term suspension or expulsion?**

When it comes to discipline, special education students are entitled to unique protections that are more extensive than the protections that apply to general education students. Some of these protections are outlined below. Keep in mind that special education students also have all of the procedural rights of non-special education students as well.

When a student will be suspended or expelled for more than ten school days, the school must convene a manifestation determination meeting within ten school days of the date of removal from school. Relevant members of the IEP team attend this meeting.

At the manifestation determination meeting, the team considers whether the student's behavior is related to his or her disability.

If there is a relationship between the disability and the behavior, then the student cannot be punished. The student must be allowed to return to the educational placement he or she attended prior to the disciplinary removal unless special circumstances exist. These special circumstances include incidents involving weapons, drugs, serious bodily

injury, and dangerous behavior. In these cases, schools or a hearing officer may remove a special education student to an interim alternative educational setting for up to 45 school days.

If it is determined that there is no relationship between the disability and the behavior, then the normal disciplinary procedures can be applied and the student can be suspended or expelled. However, the school must provide educational services to the student during the exclusion. The services must be provided in a setting that allows the student to participate in the general education curriculum and progress towards achieving the goals set out in the IEP.

With any of these disciplinary incidents, the IEP team must create or recreate the Functional Behavioral Assessment, which allows for the production of the Behavior Intervention Plan.

### **Special Education: short-term suspensions**

A special education student can be suspended for up to ten days in a school year without receiving services during the period of disciplinary exclusion. However, if a student receives a pattern of short-term suspensions that over time exceed ten school days in a school year, a Manifestation Determination Meeting must be held to address whether the behavior was related to the student's disability and the same process outlined above takes place.

**The special education information contained in this guide is adapted from TeamChild's education advocacy manual, *Make a Difference in a Child's Life: A Manual for Helping Children and Youth Get What They Need in School* (Revised August 2006)© TeamChild and Casey Family Programs.**





# (Birth to



## Early Learning (Birth to Five Years Old)

### Why is early learning so important?

Children are born ready to learn. Research has shown that during the first few years, the brain develops faster than at any other time during an individual's life.

Early learning programs have been shown to increase this learning process by helping children progress physically, developmentally, socially, and cognitively in their language and math abilities. Kindergarten teachers report that children who attended early learning/preschool are significantly more prepared for school than their classmates who did not.

Children raised in safe, stimulating environments are more independent, creative, and willing to take risks. Unfortunately, many children who come into care have not had the benefit of a safe home environment. For this reason they need extra stability, support, and early learning opportunities from you. Early learning happens not only in early learning programs, but also in high-quality child care settings, play groups, family friend and neighbor care, and at home. For this reason, it is crucial that all adults involved in a child's life—including caregivers and social workers understand the impact they have on a child's development and put measures in place that best support the child's learning needs.

It is important that children in your care have every opportunity to learn and are as ready for school as possible.

### Early Learning: The importance of a good beginning

Children, with few exceptions, should participate in some type of early learning program, especially between the critical ages of three to five.

It is important for you and your social worker to connect and coordinate with the service providers in these programs in order to assure that children are ready to enter kindergarten.

## What types of early learning services are available?

Both Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) prioritize children in foster care and offer free part-day early learning programs for children in out-of-home placements. Some communities may also offer full-day Head Start programs. Other high-quality early learning programs throughout Washington State accept child-care subsidies and/or offer sliding scale tuitions. One important point to remember: the quality of the early learning program matters. Elements to look for are:

- Small classroom sizes
- Low teacher-to-child ratios and how much individual attention each child receives
- The teacher's education and qualifications
- Currently licensed and accredited programs or programs that follow accreditation standards
- Well-maintained and age-appropriate facilities

### Tip

One of the most critical times for a young child to learn is between the ages of birth and five years old.



## Language and Communication

- Recognizes his or her name and a few written words
- Understands that written words have meaning and that reading will unlock the meaning
- Scribbles and pretends to read and write
- Uses symbols, signs and pictures as a way to communicate
- Follows simple verbal instructions
- Listens and takes turns speaking. Asks questions and makes comments about a story or a conversation
- Can tell about events or an experience in a logical sequence
- Can connect a story to their own life experiences
- Has an increasing vocabulary
- Initiates conversation with peers and adults

### Strategy For Caregivers

Talk naturally with your child about what he/she is doing, seeing, hearing.

## Ideas for encouraging a young child's interest in learning

**READ** to your child every day for at least 20 minutes.

**GET A LIBRARY CARD** for your child. Try to take your child to the library once a week to support his or her natural curiosity to read and explore.

**LIMIT TELEVISION.** Instead, help them use their own imaginations to learn. Play with puppets, do a puzzle, draw, paint, play with modeling clay, or cook with them.

**ENROLL A CHILD IN A LOCAL PRESCHOOL.** The chance to interact with other children is one big benefit of preschool. Interacting with other children means learning how to wait, how to take turns, and how to listen. Young children learn social skills when they interact with other children.

**ENCOURAGE & INSPIRE** them to try new things.

## Ready, Set, Go . . . to Kindergarten!

There's no perfect formula for when children are ready for kindergarten, but there are some skills commonly found on most kindergarten checklists. Caregivers and parents can use checklists to understand what milestones their children might meet during development and how to better support their children's learning.

Check the skills on the "Kindergarten Checklist" and see which ones your child has learned.

Recheck the chart every month to see which additional skills your child has learned.

If at anytime you have concerns about your child's development, there are people who can help. Please review the Special Education section of this guide and talk with your social worker for assistance.

Teachers want to see children on the first day of kindergarten who are healthy, mature, capable, and eager to LEARN.

## Kindergarten Checklist (for children ages four to six)



### Social Readiness

- Curious and motivated to learn
- Is learning name, address and phone number
- Can spend short periods of time away from family
- Has basic problem solving skills (bird feeder is empty, so we should put more seed in)
- Enjoys being with other children
- Is learning to finish tasks and is helpful with family chores
- Is learning to share and wait his/her turn
- Respects adult leadership
- Is learning self-control

#### Strategy For Caregivers

Provide a time when your child can participate in group activities (e.g. circle time, family meals).  
Provide opportunities for your child to make choices.

### Math Skills

- Can count to 10 by rote
- Can begin to recognize numbers
- Begins to understand that numbers represent quantity
- Can begin to count objects while understanding the representational meaning of "one block, two blocks, three blocks..."

#### Strategy For Caregivers

Play card or board games with your child that involve counting.

### Spatial Relationships

- Can identify colors and shapes
- Can sort and classify objects by colors and shapes
- Can complete a simple puzzle
- Can build with blocks

#### Strategy For Caregivers

Play classification games with your child (e.g. put a group of items that go together in a pile, like toothbrush/toothpaste, shoe/sock and have your child sort the items.

### Patterns and Relationships

- Pays attention to repeating sounds in language such as words that begin with 'B' or rhyming sounds
- Begins to understand the concepts of time such as "today", "yesterday", "tomorrow"
- Can move self in time to different patterns of beat and rhythm
- Can follow three consecutive directions

#### Strategy For Caregivers

Draw simple maps and directions that can be followed around the house to find objects.

### Physical Development

- Stands on one foot for 5 seconds
- Can go down stairs with alternating feet
- Can zip, button – coats and pants
- Puts on shoes
- Cuts with scissors
- Holds a pencil or crayon
- Runs easily with few falls

#### Strategy For Caregivers

Involve your child in activities using fine motor skills (e.g. setting the table, sorting change or buttons).

Give your child the chance to participate in activities that develop large muscles (e.g. soccer, dance, bike riding).







## Elementary School

### Elementary School

#### *Seven Steps to Help Kids Stay Ahead in Elementary School*

(From the Partnership4Learning.org)

1. Focus on home first. Experts agree that your top priority should be as your child's first teacher at home. Help your child with learning activities and good social habits.
2. Back up your child's teacher. Teachers want to treat all students the same but often admit they're more likely to take extra time with children whose parents have been supportive. Make sure they know from the start that you're on their team.
3. Connect with someone at school. Before your child faces problems, build a relationship with a principal, counselor, another teacher or even an involved parent. They can help you resolve the issue – and avoid making enemies in the process.
4. Get help right away if your child falters in math or reading. Children who still struggle with reading by third grade are more likely to drop out of school later. Problems with math at this level will limit their choices of career and college pathways that begin in middle school. Ask the teacher about tutors or other services at school before your child slips too far behind.
5. Plug in. Kids spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school. You can double their learning time by plugging them into after-school, summer and cultural activities. Unplug the TV and computer games. The doctor-recommended screen time limit is one to two hours daily.
6. Plant the seeds for college. Tell your children early and often that you expect them to attend college. Don't worry about specifics, just instill the dream. Research shows that most students who go to college never thought they had a choice.
7. Monitor motivation. Ask your children often what they liked or disliked about school. It will help you pick up early signs of trouble. Don't let them off with one word answers. Ask for details.

#### Tip

##### Monitor motivation

Ask your child often what they liked or disliked about school. It will help you pick up early signs of trouble. Ask for details. Kids who stop liking school stop learning.



## Middle School

# middle school

### Middle School: Grades 6, 7 and 8

The middle school years are tough times for kids and caregivers. No doubt about it. They are years full of dramatic changes in life experiences and self-esteem. This is true for all young people, no matter what background they come from or family history they have.

During these years, it is very important to stay in tune with your middle school youth. Pay close attention to what they are saying and to what they are and are not doing.

### Motivation and the Middle School Years:

#### How to help children have good study habits

Unlike elementary school, where teachers break assignments down into smaller parts, middle school assignments are often more complex and require students to be more self-directed.

#### Ways to help middle school students do well in school:

1. Establish a regular time and place to do daily homework. As much as possible, be available during this time in case your child needs help. Offer to quiz them as they get ready for a test and ask to see their daily assignments – even those they completed at school.
2. Spread project and test preparation over several days instead of the night before a due date. This allows time to do their very best work and ensures they're learning, not just memorizing.
3. Think beyond the textbook. Though kids may look over their class notes in anticipation of a test, to do well they need to learn to anticipate the types of questions they'll be answering. You can help teach this skill as you quiz them (e.g., "If you're asked to describe the main characters or the setting in the book Pride and Prejudice, what will your answers be?")

### Tip

Say once a day to your child or children:

"I like your good work."

"You're doing a good job."

"Good work."

"I'm proud of you."



4. When in doubt, ask their teachers to explain assignments. Teachers will often give estimates on how much time a project is likely to take or suggest what students should be focusing on as they prepare for tests.

#### **Six ideas to help with discipline issues in the middle school years**

1. Have a few key rules, not a lot of general ones. It is important to involve the child in making these rules.
2. Clearly state rules and write them down so that if they are broken, there will be no debate as to what you meant.
3. Eliminate the phrase “one more time” from your vocabulary.
4. Replace the phrase with “take responsibility for your actions.” Enforce rules consistently and confidently.
5. Discipline silently through your actions – not with warnings, threats, or discussions – and never, never yell.
6. Follow through with the consequences of a broken rule without fail.

(Adapted from: How Good Parents Raise Great Kids: The Six Essential Habits of Highly Successful Parents by Dr. Alan Davidson and Robert Davidson).

#### **Additional Programs**

**GEAR UP** – Focuses on low-income students in underserved communities who will likely be the first person in their family to go to college. In the 2009-2010 school year a total of 82 school districts in Washington state offer this program. These school districts start work with young people in middle school, guiding them through the early years of college preparation. The GEAR UP programs ensure students have access to the people and the information needed to graduate from high school and go to college. To find out if GEAR UP is a program available in your student’s school contact the school counselor. For more information about GEAR UP visit [www.gearup.wa.gov](http://www.gearup.wa.gov)

**Supplemental Educational Transition Planning Program (SETuP)** – This program provides outreach, which is designed to encourage foster care youth between the ages of 14 and 18 to prepare for postsecondary education. Children’s Administration administers SETuP, which in turn contracts with six community-based non-profit organizations stationed in each of the DSHS regions. Contractors provide foster youth with information about postsecondary opportunities and financing and promote educational aspiration and preparation. Children’s Administration has a contracted service provider in each region. For questions about this program or how to refer a youth to this program please call the program manager at 360-902-8487.

#### **Tip**

Consider a weekly family planning meeting.

Sunday is a good day to get organized and plan for the week ahead.





## **Scholarships**

**College Bound Scholarship** – Washington State Foster youth who are 7th or 8th grade students must sign a pledge by June 30 of their 8th grade year to be eligible. Students must graduate from a Washington state high school or home school with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher, demonstrate good citizenship in their school and community, and stay crime free. For more information about College Bound visit <http://www.hecb.wa.gov/Paying/waaidprgm/CollegeBoundScholarship.asp>



## High School

# high school

### The High School Years: Grades 9, 10, 11 and 12

For youth in out-of-home care, finishing high school and having educational opportunities after high school such as college or vocational training are critical for their success as adults. Unfortunately, many youth in care are behind in credits in high school due to multiple school moves, disruptive life experiences, and the effects of abuse and neglect. Many caregivers may not be aware of the many choices kids have to make up high school credits if a youth falls behind. It is very important to set up a meeting with a school counselor right away. Together, discuss ways for the youth to get caught up and back on track.

National studies have shown that foster youth who stay in school and earn a high school diploma, versus those foster youth who take the General Education Development (GED) test, have a higher rate of going onto college or vocational training, getting higher-paying jobs, and becoming self-sufficient.

Foster youth should be encouraged to work closely with a high school counselor and an independent living case manager. Counselors are free, easily accessible resources. They might make the difference for your child's educational future.

### High School Homework Checklist for Caregivers

- Provide a quiet, well-lit space, away from distractions, with paper, pens and pencils, books, a dictionary, a computer, a desk, etc.
- Try to find a separate space for each youth, or schedule quiet times for homework in designated spaces.

### Tip

Challenge your youth to take on more difficult course work. Sometimes a little nudge can make the difference between coasting and really excelling. It can also help them believe they **CAN** succeed.

- Help youth get into regular schedules during the week that include ample time each day for studying.
- Limit TV time, and do not allow it during homework.
- Be available, if possible, to answer questions or just discuss what the child is learning.
- Ask the youth how he or she keeps track of assignments. You might buy a special notebook or day planner for them.
- See if the school has a homework hotline or a webpage that lists assignments and/or a homework helpline (assistance for the child).
- Ask your youth about assignments and tests on a daily basis. Show that you are interested in what he or she is learning. Don't wait until report card time to ask how it's going.
- Advocate for your youth at school, and build relationships with teachers.

### **High School Graduation Requirements**

Beginning in the 2009-2010 school year, the high school Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) was replaced by the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE). If a student has previously passed the WASL in a specific content area (e.g., reading), the student is not required to take the HSPE.

Requirements to graduate from high school are set by The Washington State Board of Education ([www.sbe.wa.gov](http://www.sbe.wa.gov)). However, local school districts have the authority to set graduation requirements in addition to state minimums. Contact the individual school district where the youth attends school to see if there are additional graduation requirements.

### **Class credit requirements in high school 2009-2012**

- English – 3 credits
- Math – 2 credits
- Social Studies – 2.5 credits
- Electives – 5.5 credits
- Health and fitness – 2 credits
- Science – 2 credits
- Occupational education – 1 credit
- Visual or performing arts – 1 credit

### **Class credit requirements in high school 2013 and beyond**

- English – 3 credits
- Math – 3 credits
- Social Studies – 2.5 credits
- Electives – 5.5 credits
- Health and fitness – 2 credits
- Science – 2 credits
- Occupational education – 1 credit
- Visual or performing arts – 1 credit

### **Certificate of Academic Achievement**

The Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) Options is available for students who have strong skills but don't test well or just need another way to show what they know. Students can use the CAA options after taking the high school WASL/HSPE once, or if they transfer to a Washington public school in the 11th or 12th grade. There are specific requirements for these options and each option is designed to be as challenging as the WASL or HSPE.

#### **The three CAA Options are:**

- Submitting a "collection of evidence" consisting of student work showing they meet grade-level academic standards.
- AP/College Admission test scores: A student earns scores at or above a state-designated level on the SAT, ACT and Advanced Placement exams.
- An HSPE/Grades Comparison: Comparing a student's grades in specified math or English/language arts classes with the grades for students who passed the test. (This option is only available to students in 12th grade with an overall cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 3.2 on a 4.0 grading scale).

### **Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA)**

The CIA is available for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) who are unable to take the High School WASL/HSPE (with or without accommodations). As 10th graders, students in special education programs only earn a CIA by passing the WASL/HSPE-Modified (the High School WASL/HSPE with the passing score adjusted to Level 2) or Washington Alternate Assessment System Portfolio. In grades 11 and 12, students who have not yet earned a CIA may also use the Developmentally Appropriate Proficiency Exam (DAPE, formerly DAW), which allows students to take the HSPE at a grade level that best matches their



abilities. To pass the DAW, students must earn Proficient (Level 3) on each test taken. Any testing accommodations used must be consistent with the student's IEP. Students with 504 Plans are not eligible to earn a CIA.

Students receiving special education services must pass state-approved special education reading, writing and math alternate assessments. (For more information you can review the handout "How Students in Special Education participate in State Testing at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/Resources/pubdocs/SpecialEdTesting.pdf>).

### **Transfer Students and Special Cases**

Guidelines have been established for students who have special, unavoidable circumstances (e.g., an extended illness, death of immediate family member, etc) or who transfer to a Washington public school during their 11th or 12th grade year. For transfer students, the process considers whether students have passed a high school assessment in their former state. In addition, these transfer students may access the CAA Options without first taking the WASL/HSPE.

The appeal process ONLY applies to the state's testing requirement for graduation. Students with special circumstances and those who move into the state during their 11th or 12th grade year need to ask their local school district how they can fulfill the other statewide graduation requirements.

### **Culminating Project**

Students must design and complete a project on a topic of their choice and present their project to other students, teachers, parents and/or community members. This requirement offers students an opportunity to apply their learning in a "real world" way. Individual school districts set parameters for how students accomplish these projects.

### **How to prepare for education beyond high school**

#### **Ways youth in high school can begin to prepare for post-secondary education and training opportunities:**

- Take challenging classes in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, a foreign language, government, civics, economics and the arts
- Meet with career or guidance counselors to discuss colleges or vocational programs and requirements. Also,

carefully monitoring a student's high school credit accrual to ensure on time graduation

- Explore career options and talking with adults in a variety of professions to determine what they like and dislike about their jobs and what kind of education is needed for each kind of job
- Become involved in extracurricular (before or after-school) activities that interest youth and enable them to explore career interests
- Take the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/ NMSQT) in the 10th grade (fee waivers available)
- Explore careers through volunteering and internships
- GEAR UP – Training for foster parents, using the nationally recognized GEAR-UP curriculum at [www.GearUp.wa.gov](http://www.GearUp.wa.gov). The goal of this training is to give foster parents the tools needed to work with the youth in their care in helping them successfully graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education. Foster parent will receive continuing education credit towards their foster care license when completing the online training, which can be found at <http://dshsaplcy3605:35000/ca/fosterparents/videoGear.asp>

#### **Ways youth can actively plan for post-secondary education and training opportunities:**

- Meet regularly with a guidance counselor to discuss future options
- For youth receiving Special Education, make sure that the transition plans required in the IEP describe specific ways the school will help the student plan for the future.
- Request information and an application for admission from colleges or vocational programs
- Ask about special admissions requirements, financial aid and deadlines
- Attend college fairs and visiting colleges
- Identify people to ask for recommendations (e.g., teachers, counselors, social workers)
- Investigate financial aid opportunities from federal, state, local and private sources (Call the Student Aid Hotline at the U.S. Department of Education [1-800-4FED-AID] for a student guide to Federal financial aid)

- Investigate scholarships provided by corporations, labor unions, professional associations, religious organizations and credit unions
- Register for and take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the ACT, SAT Subject Tests, or any other exams required for college admission (fee waivers available)

### **Actions youth should take early in their senior year to apply for post-secondary education and training opportunities:**

- Complete all necessary financial aid forms. (Youth should complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA] available at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>, each year in January)
- Request letters of recommendations early in the year
- Prepare applications for colleges or vocational programs.

Colleges and universities can also help students with additional needs find resources and support to get through college. The following web sites offer additional information:

- Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities [www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml](http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml)
- Resource Guide for Persons with Disabilities [www.dcu.org/streetwise/ability/ed-financial.html](http://www.dcu.org/streetwise/ability/ed-financial.html)
- College Funding Strategies for Students with Disabilities [www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics select Postsecondary for Students](http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics%20select%20Postsecondary%20for%20Students).

### **Additional Programs**

There are many programs that offer youth opportunities to prepare for post-secondary education and training while they are still in high school such as:

**Upward Bound** – Provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in pre-college performance and ultimately in higher education pursuits. Serves high school students from low income families, students from families in which neither caregiver holds a bachelors degree, and low income, first generation military veterans who are preparing to enter

post-secondary education. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rates at which participants enroll in and graduate from institutions of post-secondary education. (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/HEP/trio/upbound.html>)

**Running Start** – Gives high school juniors and seniors a running start on college level classes. A junior or senior enrolls in college level classes while enrolled in high school and the classes count twice, once towards fulfillment of high school graduation requirements and again for college credit. High schools and community colleges collaborate to provide Running Start classes to youth tuition free. Students interested in this should talk with their high school counselor.

**Advanced Placement (AP)** – Gives youth the chance to try college level work in high school and to gain valuable skills and study habits for college. Credits earned through the advance placement process are transferable to college. (<http://www.collegeboard.com/ap/students/>)

**Job Corps** – A comprehensive employment and training program for at-risk youth operated on a national basis offering career development services to men and women, ages 16 to 24. The program is designed to equip youth with knowledge, skills, abilities, and support needed for long-term success in the workforce. The program involves a continuum of experiences and services which are personalized to each youth's needs. (<http://jobcorps.doleta.gov/>)

**GEAR UP** – Training for foster parents, using the nationally recognized GEAR-UP curriculum at [www.GearUp.wa.gov](http://www.GearUp.wa.gov). The goal of this training is to give foster parents the tools needed to work with the youth in their care in helping them successfully graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education. Foster parent will receive continuing education credit towards their foster care license when completing the online training, which can be found at <http://dshsaplcy3605:35000/ca/fosterparents/videoGear.asp>

**Supplemental Educational Transition Planning Program (SETuP)** – This program provides outreach, which is designed to encourage foster care youth between the ages of 14 and 18 to prepare for postsecondary education. Children's Administration administers SETuP, which in turn contracts with six community-based non-profit

organizations stationed in each of the DSHS regions. Contractors provide foster youth with information about postsecondary opportunities and financing and promote educational aspiration and preparation. Children's Administration has a contracted service provider in each region. For questions about this program or how to refer a youth to this program please call the program manager at 360-902-8487.



## Visit [www.independence.wa.gov](http://www.independence.wa.gov).

Just as youth from traditional families need and receive support and care into adulthood, so do foster youth. To assist in this transition to adulthood, CA and the Foster Care to College Partnership developed a web site for youth in care.

This website provides information for youth between the ages of 13 and 21 to help them successfully transition into adulthood. It focuses on information and programs available for youth in out-of-home-care. Topics covered include employment, education, financial aid, preparation for independent living and success in college.

Caregivers should note this web site includes specific program information, applications and contact information for a variety of programs and services available to older foster youth. Mentors, social workers, contracted providers, educators, and other adult allies will also benefit from the valuable information and resources it offers. This site will provide you with the essential tools necessary to advocate and support the youth in your care.





beyo



## Beyond High School

### **“I’ve graduated: Now what can I do?”**

A youth’s educational experience shouldn’t end the day he or she graduates from high school or receives a GED.

There are many educational resources and opportunities available to assist foster youth in his or her pursuit of post-secondary education and training. Foster youth should be encouraged from a very young age to pursue college or other training after high school.

### **Post-Secondary Options**

The type of college or training program that a youth chooses to pursue should be driven by their general career interests. These interests should be explored with the young adult as early as possible. The following section shows different types of colleges, programs offered at each type of college, and which college or training programs are required for different careers. For more information about career options, visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics handbook at <http://www.bls.gov/oco> > [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco).

### **Examples Include:**

#### **Private Vocational Colleges**

Apprenticeship: electrician, welder, fire fighter, carpenter, plumber

#### **2-year Community or Technical Colleges:**

Certificate: culinary arts, cosmetology, medical or dental assistant, truck driver

Associates Degree: administrative assistant, licensed vocational nurse, paralegal, mechanic

#### **4-year Colleges and Universities:**

Bachelor’s Degree: architect, computer programmer, stock broker, social worker

Master’s Degree: teacher, family counselor, physician assistant, school principal

Professional Degree: chiropractor, pharmacist, minister, lawyer

Doctoral Degree: college professor, economist, psychologist, superintendent

Once youth have chosen the type of college they want to attend, they should apply to multiple colleges to ensure their best chance at getting in. Community and technical colleges have open admissions policies, which means that anyone with a high school diploma can apply and enroll. Prior to taking any classes, students are required to complete a placement test. Four-year colleges and universities have a competitive admissions process that usually requires an application, SAT or ACT scores, high school transcripts, a personal essay, letters of recommendation and sometimes an interview.

### **Paying for College**

Foster youth are eligible for many types of financial aid. There are state financial aid programs, federal financial aid programs, college and university financial aid programs and scholarships from different sources. Foster youth may also be eligible for:

**Federal Pell Grants:** Federal grants of money for low-income students, the federal government requires you “earn” your financial aid award in direct proportion to the number of days you attend. If a student decides to withdraw it is **important** they check with their Financial Aid office **before** they withdraw so they understand any repayment obligation they may incur.

**Federal loans:** Money that must be paid back after students graduate from college.

**Fee waivers:** Community Colleges may offer programs that waive the cost of classes for low-income students.

**Scholarships:** Grants of money from different sources that youth must find and apply for that don’t need to be paid back.

**Institution Specific Monies:** Some community colleges and public four year universities may offer grants and stipends that do not need to be paid back.

### **Financial Aid**

#### **Federal Aid, US Department of Education**

The Student Guide provides information on student financial aid programs offered by the U.S. Department of Education. Financial aid includes primarily grants, loans, and work-study opportunities. The Student Guide is available electronically (English and Spanish) at [www.studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student\\_guide/index.html](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/students/publications/student_guide/index.html). Contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

To apply for many federal and state student aid programs, students must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The application is available electronically (English and Spanish) at [fafsa.ed.gov](http://fafsa.ed.gov) or call the Federal Student Aid Information Center 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243).

### **WA State Need Grant**

The State Need Grant program helps the state’s lowest-income undergraduate students pursue degrees, hone their skills, or retrain for new careers. Students can use the grants at public two- and four-year colleges and universities and many accredited independent colleges, universities and career schools in Washington. In 2006 the Legislature included a requirement that a priority be given to former foster youth who were dependent in Washington state. For more information contact the Higher Education Coordinating Board at 360-753-7800.

### **State Work Study**

Undergraduate and graduate students with financial need earn money for college through part-time work while gaining experience whenever possible in jobs related to their academic and career interests. In 2006 the Legislature included a requirement that a priority be given to serve former foster youth who were dependent in Washington state.

### **Scholarships**

**Casey Family Scholars – Orphan Foundation of America** provides scholarships of up to \$10,000 to young people, under the age of 25, who have spent at least 12 months in foster care and were not subsequently adopted. The scholarships are awarded for the pursuit of post-secondary education, including vocational/technical training, and are renewable each year based on satisfactory progress and financial need. For more information visit their website at [www.orphan.org](http://www.orphan.org).

**The Governors’ Scholarship** was established to assist Washington youth who will emancipate from State or federally recognized foster, group or kinship care to enroll in and complete degrees or certificates at eligible colleges in Washington. Scholarship applications and other useful information can be found at the College Success Foundation web site <http://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/gs/index.htm>

### ***Passport for Foster Youth Promise Scholarship Program***

This scholarship, administered by the Board, provides students with the financial resources necessary to succeed in higher education. The scholarship is designed to ensure the student's financial needs are met and reduce reliance on student loans. When Passport is combined with other state, federal, and institutional assistance, the total funds should be sufficient to cover all the student's educational and living expenses, with only a minimal self-help expectation. Scholarship applications and other useful information can be found at [www.hecb.wa.gov/paying/waaaidprgm/Passport.asp](http://www.hecb.wa.gov/paying/waaaidprgm/Passport.asp). For questions regarding this scholarship, contact the program manager at 360-753-7846.

***The National Foster Parent Association*** offers scholarships for college or university studies, vocational/job training and correspondence courses, including the GED. For more information visit: [www.nfpainc.org/awards/youthScholarships.cfm?page=6](http://www.nfpainc.org/awards/youthScholarships.cfm?page=6)

### **Other Support Programs**

***Independent Living (IL) Program*** – For current and former foster youth between the ages of 15 and 21. Typical support services include assistance in accessing safe and stable housing, employment training, placement and retention services, and support toward the attainment of either a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) diploma.

***Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program*** – The ETV program helps eligible current and former foster youth pay the cost of a certificate, program or degree at an accredited college. ETV awards (up to \$5,000) are unique to each student and are based on the college's cost of attendance (COA). ETV awards cannot exceed the COA so not all students will receive the full \$5,000 award. Youth who receive ETV prior to their 21st birthday can continue to receive ETV until age 23. For more information or to apply please visit [www.independence.wa.gov](http://www.independence.wa.gov), you can also email: [etvwash@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:etvwash@dshs.wa.gov) or call 1-877-433-8388.

***Foster Care to 21 Program*** – This program allows youth who were Washington State dependents to remain in foster care after they graduate from high school or their GED program to attend a college or vocational program

until age 21. The program provides youth with a foster care placement, medical coverage and other agreed upon support services. Youth can apply to the program up to 6 months after leaving foster care. Current and former foster youth will need to complete the Foster Care to 21 program application, which can be found at [www.independence.wa.gov](http://www.independence.wa.gov). For more information please contact the program manager at 360-902-848.

### **Tips for supporting success in college:**

- Many students choose to work while in college. Working less than 20 hours per week usually does not interfere with school, but working more than part-time can make it very difficult for students to balance their coursework and succeed in their classes.
- It is a good idea for students to visit their financial aid office on a regular basis and to get to know their financial aid officer. This will help ensure that students receive their financial aid and scholarship money at the beginning of each term.
- It is really important for students to meet on a regular basis with their academic advisor to make sure that they are taking the right courses to earn the degree or certificate they are working towards.
- Most college campuses offer Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs) or TRIO programs that provide extra support to low-income or first generation college students. These programs often provide tutoring, advising, mentoring and counseling to help students succeed in college.

### **What happens to youth with disabilities when they go on to post-secondary education?**

The federal law that applies to students with disabilities, IDEA, no longer applies when a student has been re-evaluated and determined to no longer require special education services, graduates with a regular high school diploma, or reaches age 21. However, youth with disabilities still have the right to accommodations to support them when they go on to most post-secondary programs. 504 Plans do not end in 12th grade, so this law and the Americans with Disabilities Act provide legal protections for youth.

Upon graduation, schools must provide to a youth with an IEP an exit summary which describes their disability and their needs. This document, or a 504 Plan, can be taken to the post-secondary school to set up a plan full of accommodations for the student to succeed. Each school has a different go-to person, but usually they can be found in the Student Services Department.

The big change from high school to post-secondary is that it becomes the students' responsibility to alert the schools to their needs and to ensure that each of their teachers receives the information. The responsibility to advocate for themselves lies with the students at this stage.

Colleges and universities can also help students with additional needs to find resources and offer support to get through college. The following web sites offer additional information:

- Financial Aid for Students with Disabilities  
[www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml](http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml)
- Resource Guide for Persons with Disabilities  
[www.dcu.org/streetwise/ability/ed-financial.html](http://www.dcu.org/streetwise/ability/ed-financial.html)
- College Funding Strategies for Students with Disabilities  
[www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics select "Postsecondary for Students"](http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics%20select%20Postsecondary%20for%20Students)





education and advocacy



## Education Advocacy Program

Children's Administration (CA) contract with Treehouse to provide the Education Advocacy Program, which assists children and youth, social workers and caregivers with difficult education issues. Education Advocacy Coordinators are stationed in CA offices in each region to provide advocacy interventions for eligible children and youth who have been identified as having educational challenges.

### What types of advocacy are offered?

**Direct Advocacy** – for educational cases requiring more intensive advocacy, the Coordinator will directly intervene to resolve the situation. Examples include: school enrollment or placement crisis, school discipline issues, and accessing services such as Special Education.

**Consultation** – providing the caregivers, youth or social workers with the advocacy steps, strategies and tools to address the situation themselves with support from the Coordinator. Examples include school communication conflicts, accessing services such as 504 plans, and attendance issues.

**Information and Referral** – when a situation can be resolved by providing educational information, local resources or referrals to the appropriate agency or service. The Coordinator(s) in each region will have access to necessary information to assist youth. Examples include resources on alternative education programs, community tutoring services, and Special Education laws.

### Who is eligible for the Education Advocacy Program?

Any child or youth who is placed in out-of-home care, is eligible for the program.

### Who can make a referral for education advocacy?

All referrals need to be initiated by the child's/youth's social worker or by Child Health and Education Tracking (CHET) screeners. Call your social worker to request a referral. In addition to direct support, the Education Advocacy Coordinators will also provide training to social workers, caregivers, and community providers.





## References and Additional Resources

**College Success Foundation**

[www.collegesuccessfoundation.org](http://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org)

**Seattle Public Schools (2003). Guidelines for Entering Kindergarten, Seattle, WA: Seattle Public School District.**

**Kent School District (2005). Preparing for Kindergarten. Kent, WA: Kent School District.**

**ERIC Digest, Decision Making with Youth in Special Education and other education articles**

[www.ericdigests.org](http://www.ericdigests.org)

**Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction**

[www.k12.wa.us](http://www.k12.wa.us)

**TeamChild®**

[www.teamchild.org](http://www.teamchild.org)

**Treehouse**

[www.treehouseforkids.org](http://www.treehouseforkids.org)

**Casey Family Programs**

[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)

**Washington State Court Appointed Special Advocates**

[www.WashingtonStatecasa.org](http://www.WashingtonStatecasa.org)

**Child Welfare League of America**

[www.cwla.org/programs/housing/mckinneyvento.htm](http://www.cwla.org/programs/housing/mckinneyvento.htm)

**National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty Policy Brief**

[www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/pubdocs/PolicyBrief.doc](http://www.k12.wa.us/HomelessEd/pubdocs/PolicyBrief.doc)

**Washington PAVE (Parents Are Vital in Education)**

[www.washingtonpave.org](http://www.washingtonpave.org)

**Washington Protection and Advocacy System**

[http://wpas-rights.org/publications/Special%20Education/SpEd\\_3.htm](http://wpas-rights.org/publications/Special%20Education/SpEd_3.htm)

**Infant Toddler Early Intervention Program (ITEIP)**

<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/iteip/>

**The State of Washington Department of Early Learning**

<http://www.del.wa.gov/>







**CA** Children's Administration

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